

Padilla

THE DIRECTOR OF
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

National Intelligence Officers

17 September 1981

NOTE FOR: The Director
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National Intelligence Officers
Analytic Group/NIC

FROM: C/NIC



In case you missed it, this statement
by Heriberto Padilla is very eloquent on the
values of freedom.

Attachment:
"After 20 Cuban Years"
New York Times, 17 Sept 81

NEW YORK TIMES - THURSDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 1981

People often ask me about my impressions of New York City, returning as I have after a 20-year absence. They are also curious about those 20 years. I understand their curiosity, since during that period I lived not only in my native Cuba, but also in Moscow, Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw — either as official correspondent for the Cuban press or as representative of the Ministry of Foreign Trade. After trying to answer their inquiries, I note that they prefer complicated explanations to simple answers.

During the last 20 years, I lived in a world made up of ideas painted in black and white. Everything that came from the United States was anathema — a product of imperialism. Not even the TV broadcasts of the landing of the first man on the moon were available to Cuban audiences. This sense of things black and white is implacable, and extends to every terrain of human endeavor.

In cultural relations, it takes on inconceivable dimensions. In Cuba, any Latin American writer who accepts an award or scholarship from a United States foundation is defined "objectively" as a collaborator with imperialism. The Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, opposing such simplistic pigeonholes, has undergone all sorts of attacks, and his books have been removed from all Cuban libraries. The Argentine novelist Julio Cortázar has lavished praise on every political line taken by the Revolution; nonetheless, at least up to the date of my departure, few of his books were in circulation — one of his recent novels is considered an utter libel against progressive ideas. The books of the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes are not available: The political directorate has deduced, objectively of course, that he is supported by imperialist institutions and that his criticisms of the empire's foreign policy are peripheral.

This sense of black and white finally permeates everyone. It certainly got to me. When I landed in Montreal last year and I saw the affable and smiling face of Jan Kalicki, an aide from Senator Edward Kennedy's office who was there to greet me, I almost feared that right behind him there would be an

After 20 Cuban Years

By Heberto Padilla

equally affable and smiling Central Intelligence Agency man in a fedora, armed with camera, tape recorder, and bulging attaché case. I was surely going to be spirited off to a safe house, where an intense interrogation would take place. Funny, he never came. Coming back to New York after 20 years, I do feel strangely empty. Not only am I incapable of taking any slogan seriously, but I feel betrayed by many intellectuals who, I once thought, were our sages, our moral superiors. The theoretical model proposed by Marx and Engels seems to me now a fatal determinism, as repugnant as the Absolute Ideal of Hegel, which ended by sanctioning Napoleon and the Prussian state. The 19th-century socialist utopias now seem to me precursors of the forced-labor camps and the ideal City of Man in which the New Man was to be created. Their works seem to me now like luxuriant verbal constructions, no less distant from reality than those of the socialist thinkers Georg Lukacs, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno: empty Scholasticism.

Communism is no longer the exemplary challenge of our epoch. Rather, it is the ugly summation of everything that has been and is. For example, we now know that the situation in Poland does not illustrate a democratic development of socialism. What has happened is that the living organism of Poland has rejected the alien socialist system, just as transplanted kidneys and hearts get rejected by the body. It makes no difference that this rejection has not found its language. In the Com-

munist world, the language of political struggle is always clandestine, by definition. What counts is where the political events are heading, not the language with which these events are described. A new language will force itself into being.

Over the last 20 years, I have lived in countries where the official and also the unofficial language of the left is in a state of sclerosis. It is nauseating to see such language pretend to cover up unpredicted facts. I am so sick of these slogans that in my most perverse moods I am even tempted to think that the opinions of the most blatant conservatives seem more coherent than those of the messianic leftist reformers. I tell you — things are that bad!

I love to walk around the college campuses in the Northeast. As I go through the halls of New York University and look around the campus at Princeton, where so many scholars, exiled by the vicissitudes of our time, have worked and lived, I am struck by something that will be obvious to all Americans: No one, Government official or colleague, has asked me what I was going to say in the seminars and courses that I am going to give this fall. This is new for me. Simple, but true. It is difficult to ask anyone born into freedom to realize exactly what one or he possesses.

In 1960, I wandered through the streets of New York, this city which exalted and fulfilled the self that I was then. At that time, I couldn't even imagine a freedom as invisible, dependable and natural as the air. But during the last 20 years, I have lived in frightening laboratories of social experimentation, spaces walled by test tubes where the same experiment always ended with the same chemical result: tyranny. I have learned something about the value that is freedom. Perhaps no one in this country will ever have to go through my kind of apprenticeship, and never have the need to learn the lesson I now know.

Heberto Padilla, who was exiled from Cuba in March 1980, is author of the forthcoming "Legacies: Selected Poems." This article was translated from the Spanish by Alexander Coleman.